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THE RED RIVER PILOT.

By PAUL BRADDON.

CHAPTER I.

THE PILOT ON DECK.

"WHAT is it, Major? Anything wrong, old fellow?"

The dog, carefully threading his way through the woods in advance of his master, had suddenly paused, snuffed the air uneasily, and then had returned to his master's side, emitting the faintest possible whine.

"What is it, Maje; Indians?"

The dog's face had in it a look approaching human intelligence; one might have easily supposed he understood the words, and he certainly gave what, to his master, was an intelligible reply, by drawing back his lips and showing his teeth.

"So?" muttered the man. "They've been here, but gone. Lead on, Maje."

The dog once more took the lead, advancing with a steady, noiseless step, selecting as if by instinct the best paths and avoiding the tangled thickets.

Several hundred yards from where Maje had first stopped, he paused again, then turned aside at right angles and cautiously approached a clump of bushes. When within half a dozen feet of the bushes he stopped and glanced back at his master.

"Maje don't scent danger, that's certain. He wouldn't act like that if he did," soliloquized the master, and relying entirely on the sagacity of the brute he stepped forward and parted the bushes.

As he did so he uttered a low exclamation of surprise, for his eyes lighted on the dead body of an Indian, his head divested of its scalp.

"His face looks familiar," muttered the man, and seizing hold of the Indian's shoulders he dragged the body forth into the better light among the more open trees. "It's the Teton, as I live. Maje, old boy, it's our old friend, the Teton. Don't you know him?"

The dog, snuffing about the body, looked up at this question and uttered a low whine; and then he began to lick the face of the dead Indian in a caressing way.

"This was done yesterday," referring to the killing of the Teton, a judgment based on the feeling of the body. "It's a wonder the wild animals ain't been at yer afore this. If I had a spade I'd bury yer, but I'll do what I kin under ther circumstances."

So saying he lifted the dead Indian, and after a hard tussle managed to deposit the body in the fork of the branches of a near-by tree, high enough from the ground to be out of reach of most of the beasts of prey.

"I'll be back this way afore long, Teton, and then I'll bury yer if yer here yet," and then brushing a tear from his eye, he added: We have spent many a long winter's night together, we have; but we'll never do so again. Well—well, I'll not grieve. Yer wouldn't a done so, 'cept for the fact that a rascally Loup was the one that got away with yer and now carries your scalp. Well, good-by, old fellow—lead on, Maje!"

The dog was a magnificent brute as to size, as to what his breed was it would be impossible to say, for in his build and characteristics he resembled in one point or another, a bloodhound, an English mastiff, and a Newfoundland; and probably was a mixture of all three.

His master was equally noteworthy in appearance.

Large-framed, heavily built, but without an ounce of superfluous flesh on his body. Apparently in the neighborhood of thirty years of age, and what under the circumstances was singular, with a face as smooth as a woman's, and entirely devoid of whiskers. As if to make up for a lack of this appendage his hair was of luxuriant growth, and hung down over his shoulders.

He was clad in a hunting shirt and leggings of buckskin, ornamented profusely with fringe, while his head was covered by a very wide-rimmed soft felt hat.

His defensive weapons consisted of a long knife, and in his belt a brace of pistols and a keen bladed dagger, or scalping knife.

And the being whom we have thus hastily described was Joe Gresham, better known under the *soubriquet* of the Red River Pilot.

An hour or so after leaving the spot where he had found the body of the dead Teton, between whom and himself a warm friendship had existed, he struck the Red River.

"Here we are, Maje," he said, as he paused on the river bank, "and on time, too," glancing up at the sun to note the hour of the day.

A few minutes later he drew from its place of concealment a roughly-made skiff; this he entered, followed by Maje, who took his place in the bow, and there sat quietly, making no motion to destroy the equilibrium of the craft, which, shoved from the bank, was at once caught and carried down stream by the current.

It is not our purpose to follow the journey down the river, devoid as it was of accident or incident that could interest the reader. Instead, we will advance the story to the hour of ten o'clock one dark night, when the Pilot sighted a camp-fire.

"Here we are at the end of our journey, Maje, and you will have a chance to give yer legs a decent stretching."

Silently guiding the skiff in shore, it touched the bank within several hundred feet of the camp. The dog jumped lightly ashore, and followed his master, both presenting themselves so suddenly before Captain Sam Jones as to give that individual a start.

"How in thunder's this! Didn't the picket hail you? I heard nothing of it!"

"Have you got a picket?" said the pilot, with a smile. "I hain't seen nothing of him."

"Well—well—never mind. How goes it, Joe?" and Captain Sam shook the pilot warmly by the hand.

"About the same as always. Yer look hearty still, Captain Sam. I was afraid they might send somebody else. Come here, Maje! Give your paw to the captain; so, that's right! Good-night, capen, guess I'll turn in," and striding away, the pilot was soon rolled in his blanket, sleeping profoundly, Maje by his side with a paw on his breast.

CHAPTER II.

THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES.

THAT our story may be better understood, it may be wise here to enter into a little explanation.

What are now known as the states of Louisiana, Arkan-

sas, Missouri, a portion of Texas and Iowa, and Kansas and the Indian Territory, were taken possession of by the French, and were known by and all comprehended under the title of Louisiana. France held it until 1762, and then ceded it to Spain. It remained a Spanish province until 1800, when Spain ceded it back to France. The latter government held it until 1803, when it was purchased by the United States, which afterward erected the states mentioned.

In 1804 the U. S. government decided on exploring its new accession, and in the spring of 1805 Captain Sam Jones was sent with a party to explore the Red River, from its junction with the Mississippi as high up as he could go. And Joe Gresham had been engaged the season before to meet the exploring party at the mouth of the Red River and act as pilot up it.

According to the agreement Joe had made, he was to meet the party at this spot on the first day of May. He had arrived there on the last night in April, a few hours in advance of the time agreed upon.

The morning of the first day of May dawned clear and beautiful. By sunrise the pilot was stirring, and he and Maje had covered a good three miles by way of exercise before the others were stirring.

"Good-morning, Joe," said Captain Sam, putting in an appearance; "a fine day for a start."

"Couldn't be better," was the rather sententious rejoinder, Joe not being given to the use of many words when conversing, though when alone with Maje he would talk to himself for half an hour without more than a pause to fetch his breath.

"As you say, couldn't be better. And now, Joe, for a few questions. Are we going to have any difficulty in going up the river?"

"The tide 's ag'in yer."

"Of course," said the captain, and then, detecting a twinkle in Joe's eye, he added, "but that is not what I meant, you know."

"What did you mean, then?"

"Whether the Indians would give us any trouble."

"Why didn't yer say so, then?"

"Well, I say so now. Shall we have any trouble?"

Joe became more serious-looking now.

"Hard telling, capen. The Injins are more lively this spring than they've been now for some years."

"And why?"

"Well, 'cause, as yer will see, this here Louisiana's changed hands so often that things is topsy-turvy like, an' old Evil-Eye, the Injin chief, is smart enough to see and profit by it."

"But how does this change of government upset things?"

"How?" and the pilot's eyes opened with astonishment at being asked such a question. "Be yer a baby? A suck-in' child 'd see with half an eye. Why, of course you know we had Spanish alcaldes here?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, some of 'em are ruling here yet, and don't like to pack up their goods and get out until they're druv."

"Some of them here yet, Joe, and in authority? You certainly do not mean it!"

"I do, for all that," was the reply.

"Well, we must attend to that," said the captain.

Joe turned away, and, going to where the camp-fire was burning, "cooked his coffee" for breakfast.

They were all ready to proceed up the river that morning, and in less than an hour after finishing breakfast camp was broken. They all embarked in skiffs, and, under Joe's leadership, commenced the ascent of the river.

It was slow and monotonous work. Captain Sam sat perched up in the bow of a skiff, which generally was kept abreast of the pilot's light craft, a large book on his knees, into which he was constantly making entries as to the character of the country through which they passed, the depth of the stream, the obstacles to navigation, and the like.

At night they pulled in shore and went into camp.

In this manner some days passed, no incident occurring to break the monotony.

"What is the matter, Joe?" asked Captain Sam, one afternoon, seeing a saddened expression on the pilot's face.

"Nothing pertickler," was the evasive reply.

He thought it unmanly that he had allowed himself to become affected as he neared the spot where he had left the body of the Teton.

About four o'clock Joe called to the captain:

"Suppose we go ashore here and camp for the night?"

"Not by any means. The sun is fully three hours high yet, and we can make five or six miles more without any trouble. But"—he paused and looked keenly at Joe a minute—"perhaps you have a reason for our going ashore here?"

"I have a reason."

"What is it?"

"I would rather not give it."

"Well," Captain Sam said, regretfully, "I'll do as you wish, Joe. I've had such reports of you that I feel that I must trust you."

"Thank you," said Joe; and then a dark cloud gathered on his brow as he saw Lieutenant Lasher bend forward and speak to the captain.

These two men had hated each other from the moment that their eyes first met.

Because he disliked Joe, Lasher distrusted him. And because Joe disliked Lasher, he thought the lieutenant was anything but good.

"The varmint!" muttered Joe. "He's trying to p'ison the captain agin me as sure as fate."

"It is my advice not to go ashore here," said Lasher to the captain, in an earnest tone.

"Why not?"

"It looks suspicious. Look at the shore there! A worse place for a camp could hardly be selected; all grown up with bushes which would give an Indian cover until he was within a dozen feet of us. Besides, he won't give any reason for wanting to camp in this particular spot."

Captain Sam looked at the shore. Certainly it was a poor place for a camp. It did look a trifle suspicious.

"I say, Joe, that looks like a poor camping-ground," he remarked.

"So it is," muttered the pilot.

"And yet you want to camp here?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"Yer axed me once afore and I told yer I wouldn't say."

Captain Sam's face clouded. He was in a quandary. He was startled by Joe's voice right in his ear.

"Spit it out capen; yer don't trust me entirely, and all on account of what that there skunk has been a-saying of to yer."

"What do you mean by speaking to me in that manner?" demanded the lieutenant, angrily. "I'll have you court-martialed!"

"No yer won't," said Joe, calmly. "'Cause I ain't never listed in the sarvice, and yer ain't my superior officer. But"—and his eyes snapped wickedly—"if yer can't swaller being called a *skunk*, and yer want ther satisfaction of a man, yer can get it in any style yer please—with fists, rifles, pistols, or knives. Take yer ch'ice; say the word, and burn me if I won't make it lively for yer."

"Silence!" cried the captain. "I'll have no quarreling or fighting, understand that, both of you. Lasher, I'm surprised that you should so forget your dignity as an officer to engage in a petty quarrel; and as for you, Joe, I'll have no more of it. Now, lead the way to shore, and mind yourself!" this last in a tone of warning.

In a very few minutes they were on shore. Joe sullenly staked out the camping ground, and then, shouldering a

spade in addition to his rifle, he dove into the woods, accompanied only by his dog.

CHAPTER III.

MAHTOREE.

As the reader will have seen, the pilot's reason for wishing to camp there for the night was to give him an opportunity of going to see where he had left the Teton and bury him. Had Captain Sam asked him in a quiet way Joe would have explained this, only he would not enter into an explanation that would reach the ears of Lasher, whom he hated thoroughly.

"Now, Maje, we're off," said Joe, when once they were out of sight of the camp, and dropping into a sort of jog trot he covered ground very rapidly; meanwhile, his sharp eyes were ever flashing about him, while his own ears were as sharply pricked up as those of his intelligent dog.

They were within half a mile of the tree in which he had placed the body of Teton, when Maje began to snuff the ground and run uneasily from side to side.

"Ha! Maje smells Injin," and Joe came to a dead halt.

Stooping, he examined the earth carefully, and as he did so his face became more grave and thoughtful than it had been.

He appeared finally to reach the conclusion that he needed to fear nothing, although it would be wise to adopt a more cautious mode of proceeding.

About a quarter or three-eighths of a mile more had been covered when he suddenly halted.

"Thunder! but there's a scrimmage a-goin' on just ahead there," he muttered. "Between Injins, too. If they were white men they'd make as much noise with their tongues as with their feet."

Laying his hands on Maje's neck and keeping him in check, Joe began to cautiously advance. It only took a couple of minutes to reach a position where he could see the struggle that was taking place.

Two powerfully-built, athletic Indians were locked in each other's arms, struggling with might and main for supremacy.

Their eyes burned with a deadly fire, their faces were grim as those of fiends, and glowed with a fearful hatred, and Joe knew that the battle would never be ended until one or the other lay dead, his scalp dangling at the victor's belt.

They were evenly matched. Joe saw this and determined not to interfere. "Let them fight it out," he thought; "as soon as one drops, I'll put a bullet in the other."

At last, panting, out of breath, completely exhausted, the foes paused in their mad struggle to regain their wind. But they never relaxed their hold on each other; it would have given a chance to clutch the knife that each wore at his belt.

Thus for a minute or so, and then the battle was renewed. It was a horrible yet an entrancing sight. The gladiators of old never fought as did those two Indians, now struggling fiercely to throw each other, now pausing and in a wily manner trying a trip, yet always taking care never to be unguarded.

Up to this time he had seen the face of only one of the combatants.

But now their positions changed.

He saw the face of the other.

Like lightning his whole manner was altered, and he hastily cocked his pistol.

"Mahtoree!" he exclaimed. "By gosh, it's lucky I stumbled across this picnic."

At that moment he whom Joe had spoken of as Mahtoree, in stepping quickly back to avoid a trip, brought his heel in contact with an exposed root. In an instant his antagonist took advantage of the momentary loss of Mahtoree's equilibrium; he threw himself forward and his weight carried Mahtoree to the earth.

With a stoicism that only an Indian possesses, Mahtoree looked calmly up into his enemy's face when he saw that the battle was over. No shudder crossed his frame, not a muscle moved, nor an eyelid twitched as he saw the blade descend to drink his life's blood.

"Wah!" he grunted. "It is good!"

At this juncture came a sharp crack, and a bullet, more swift even than the Indian's arm, crashed into his brain. The knife fell from his grasp, and with a thud he fell prone beside Mahtoree.

The latter picked himself nimbly up, and then, with arms folded across his breast, looked in the direction whence the shot had come, his face as unruffled as though he had not been within a hair's breadth of eternity; as if, being there, he had not been rescued. His face was as blank and impassive as stone.

"Who shoots the dog of a Loup?" he finally said. "Let my brother's face be seen. The life of Mahtoree is his, and Mahtoree will die as becomes a warrior."

This was said in the Pawnee tongue, but in this instance, as in all others where necessary, we shall render the translation.

"Sago, Mahtoree, sago."

"Smoothface!" ejaculated Mahtoree, as Joe appeared, "sago—sago!"

("Sago," a friendly greeting, the word being used by nearly all the Indian tribes.)

For one instant a look of pleasure rested on the Indian's face, and then it was gone. He was the impersonation again of impassive dignity.

"Why Mahtoree no take Loup scalp?" and Joe pointed to the dead Indian.

"Mahtoree no kill Loup. Loup scalp no right for him to have. Loup scalp Smoothface's."

"You take it," urged Joe; "I don't want it. But if it was a Comanche scalp, now," and Joe's face was lighted with a look of terrible anger—"if it was, I'd have it off quicker'n greased lightning."

But Joe had long since learned to bring his feelings into subjection, and did so on this occasion.

"You take the Loup's scalp, Mahtoree," he urged again.

"Smoothface no remember well. Loup scalp not Mahtoree's. When Mahtoree go back to tribe: 'You take all dem scalp?' 'No,' I say, 'friend kill Loup first, den I take scalp.' All laugh. Course could say kill all Loup self, but Mahtoree no got crooked tongue."

Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"Do as you please. I never take any but a Comanche's scalp."

A puzzled expression crossed the face of Mahtoree. It would never do to go away and leave the Loup in possession of the scalp, for the loss of it was viewed as a disgrace to the loser.

"Crow get Loup scalp," he grunted at last, and with his keen knife making a circle around the crown of the Loup's head, he tore off the reeking scalp, carried it a short distance, and flung it among the branches of a tree.

"Now, den, why come here?" he asked of Joe.

"To bury the Teton."

"Teton gone to happy hunting ground?"

Joe could detect no look of surprise in the Indian's face, although he certainly could not have been prepared to hear this news.

"Yes," said Joe. "Will yer go along?"

Mahtoree nodded and silently fell into Joe's wake.

The body of the Teton was found where Joe had left it,

although it had been sadly disfigured by the birds of prey.

Half an hour's work sufficed to dig a narrow trench, into which the Teton was then laid. After the earth was filled in, Joe's lips moved in prayer for a moment, ere quitting the spot.

"Which way?" grunted Mahtoree.

"Back to the Red river. Which way goes Mahtoree?"

He nodded in the same direction.

"Then come along."

"Smoothface come back to hut winter time?" suddenly asked Mahtoree, after they had walked some time in silence.

"If I live until then."

Not another word was spoken until they were within an eighth of a mile of the encampment. Then the Indian suddenly halted.

"Good-by. Mahtoree go now. Good dog, Maje!" patting the dog on the back.

"Where are you going, Mahtoree?"

"Up ribber. Hatchet dig up. Heap blood—heap scalp—bimeby—pretty soon. Take care white friends—no lose scalp—keep eye open; shut eye—scalp go fore know it," with which oracular remarks, the Indian vanished, and Joe resumed his way towards camp.

"So—so! talking with an Indian, eh? The captain must know of this; it looks suspicious," and from a clump of bushes, concealed in which he had seen the parting, but had not heard the words, arose Lieutenant Lasher.

CHAPTER IV.

WHY JOE HATED COMANCHES.

"THAT'S a strange weapon of defense, Joe," remarked Captain Sam, as the pilot deposited the spade in the skiff from which it had been taken.

"It was used for defense, surely," was the reply. "It was used to defend a friend from the vultures of the air, by putting him under ground. He was a redskin, at that! The Teton and Mahtoree, a Pawnee, and myself, have wintered together for some years."

Captain Sam's face lighted. Here was the explanation which the pilot had before refused to give him. He would have questioned Joe, only that he knew it would be distasteful to that individual. But his distrust was all wiped out, his confidence was fully restored.

When Lasher drew the captain aside half an hour later in a mysterious manner, he was listened to until he mentioned Joe's name; then Captain Sam brought him up short.

"Say no more against the pilot, Lasher, for I'm convinced that he is all right."

"But I saw him with——"

"I don't care if you saw him with the devil himself," returned the captain, and the discomfited Lasher moved off in a huff.

"Very well, don't listen, then! If you lose your scalp because you didn't, it's all your own fault," he grumbled.

Joe saw that the captain again had all confidence in him, and his ill humor vanished; and sitting with the captain that night beside the camp-fire, he talked more freely of himself than he ever had before.

"Yes," he said, in answer to a question of Captain Sam's; "yes, there are good Injins as well as bad ones, although they're mostly bad. There was the Teton and Mahtoree, both as honest and straightforward in their dealings as Quakers; when either of them said a thing, I'd sooner believe it than anything a living white man could say to me. Yes, there's some good Injins—a few. Mahtoree's a Pawnee, though there's lots of that tribe as bad as they make 'em. In all tribes there's a few as is good—

except the Comanches!" the last being said so bitterly that it could not escape the captain's notice.

"You hate the Comanches?" suggested the captain.

Again that expression of terrible anger leaped into the pilot's face, and in a suppressed tone, he uttered impressively, two words:

"I'd oughter!"

"Why?" the captain at length ventured to ask him.

"It's a subject I never like to allude to," said Joe, in a full tone, his language so pure that the captain was given a new surprise by this singular individual. "It pulls me fearfully here," and he laid a hand over his heart. "In a few words, this is the whole of it: When I was a boy of ten, a pack of bloody Comanches swooped down one night and murdered my father and my mother—my poor mother!" he added, pathetically, his eyes filling with tears. "He died instantly, but my poor mother lived for some hours, writhing in agony, her head split open by a tomahawk, her scalp gone. By an accident I was saved, and was beside my mother from the time they left until she died. Can you wonder that I hate 'em? I swore an awful oath, child as I was, to be revenged. I lived for revenge. I grew up with only that idea in my brain, and on the day I became eighteen I began my work of vengeance. I killed my first Comanche! Since then twenty-three more have dropped, and I am not done yet. This here gun will be a curiosity some day," slapping in an affectionate manner the stock of his gun, which weapon he never parted with, night or day.

It was a gun which had often excited the captain's curiosity, the stock appearing to be made of a single sheet of copper, smooth in parts but in others rough, as if it had been scratched upon.

"Why will it be a curiosity?" he asked.

"Just look at that stock!" said Joe, holding fast of the barrel while the captain examined it by the aid of the camp fire. He found that the scratchings were really a rude sort of pictures, delineating struggles with Indians; in each and every instance a figure—intended to be that of a white man, and that man himself—being in the act of slaying a Comanche.

"Now look at this!"

Joe had got the weapon in his own possession again, and as he uttered these words he touched an ingeniously arranged spring, and the end of the stock, the curved piece fitting to the shoulder, opened like a door, on a hinge.

The stock was hollow. From its interior the pilot took out a bunch of queer, nondescript-looking things.

They were dried scalps.

"There, count 'em," said Joe. "You'll find just twenty-four on 'em," dropping back into his border phraseology.

"Scalps!" exclaimed the captain, in tones of mingled horror and disgust, as he shrank away.

"Yes, scalps, and every one of 'em a Comanche! Don't like 'em, eh? Well, back in the stock they go."

As carefully as though he were handling diamonds Joe returned the scalps to their hiding-place; there came a sharp click as the spring closed, and they were concealed safely from sight.

What more might have passed was cut short by their hearing the hail of the picket.

"Who goes there?"

"A friend," was the reply.

"A white man, at least," said the captain. "Who can he be? Let him come into camp."

Joe had sunk back and was now lying flat on the ground, his hands thrown upward and beneath his head, his wide-brimmed felt hat drawn down until scarcely an inch of his face could be seen.

He apparently paid no attention to what passed between the newcomer and the captain, yet drank in every word. And when the stranger, accepting Captain Sam's invitation

to make himself at home, sat down, the pilot's eyes scrutinized him closely.

"Durn yer picter!" he muttered, "I don't like yer looks, I don't. And Maje says the same thing. Calls yerself Bob Short, does yer? By gosh, from the descriptions I've heard of the Muskrat, yer look enough like him to be his twin brother."

Then, arising, he selected a spot and stretched himself out to sleep with the utmost nonchalance, even though he more than half suspected that their visitor was none other than the dastardly renegade, the Muskrat, who had betrayed hundreds of palefaces into the hands of the savages.

To most people it would have seemed foolhardy. But the pilot had been in the woods, and knew that no band of savages was within three or four miles of them. And besides, it was not the style of the Muskrat's work to betray a camp to their savage foes until he had learned how much there was to be made by it, and until he had decoyed them into some position where the whites could be swept from existence without too great a loss to his red allies.

"If he does that," thought Joe, "it'll be only when I'm drunk. I'll keep an eye on him, and if he acts at all suspicious, and gives me reason to think he is the Muskrat, he'll live about ten seconds afterwards."

And, composing himself, the pilot went to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

THE MUSKRAT.

THE pilot was not far out of his reckoning in regard to the stranger who had sought the shelter of their camp for the night.

"Even if he ain't the Muskrat he's a suspicious-looking customer, and will bear watching," thought Joe, and when he awoke in the morning his first glance was directed in search of Bob Short.

At about the same time that individual arose from a recumbent to a sitting position, and as he darted a swift glance about him his eyes encountered Joe's.

"Mornin', pard," saluted Bob Short. "By yer dress I sees yer is the guide of ther party."

"By the same token—your dress—you're a trapper and hunter."

"Hit it squar in ther bull's-eye."

As he spoke, Short gained his perpendicular, and advanced to Joe's side.

With a manner that was void of all appearance of suspecting him, Joe listened to all he said, and replied to all his questions unhesitatingly. And yet not a single query was there that was not well weighed, and not a reply was there given which—if this man was the Muskrat—could be used to the disadvantage of the exploring party.

A baffled look crept into Short's face, but he wisely turned it away so that the pilot did not see it.

It was now Joe's turn to question.

"Goin' up the river?"

"No, down."

"Rather late to be going down the river with peltry, ain't it?" and Joe glanced at him from the corner of his eye.

"Yes, but that is not my purpose."

"Goin' after powder and ball, maybe?"

"No, on private business."

"Come from up river?"

"Yes."

"I've heerd sumw'at that ther Injins is gettin' lively up thar. Is that ther case, pard?"

A crafty smile played for one fleeting moment about Short's mouth, and then he replied:

"It may be so, but I didn't see anything of it, or even hear of it. It's a false alarm that was give yer, pard, depend on it."

"I'm glad to hear that. Of course you know what you are talkin' about?"

"Well, I'd oughter, seein' I've been in the Injin country more'n a dozen years, and fit with 'em scores of times."

Joe turned away.

His suspicions concerning this man were now graver than ever. Joe had it from Wahtoree, who was perfectly reliable, that there was trouble above, and this man said there was not. Joe shrewdly suspected that it was told him to lull him into a sense of security, that they might fall an easier prey to the savages.

When breakfast was over and Bob Short prepared to take his departure, Joe felt almost disposed to not let him go, but to detain him as a prisoner. But Joe had recently seen how an honest man might easily be suspected, in having been suspected himself. Perhaps, after all, Short was what he seemed, an honest trapper and hunter.

"Much obliged to all of yer, gentlemen," said Bob Short, as he slung his rifle into the hollow of his arm and struck away from camp toward the narrow trail that followed the river shore.

Of a sudden there was a contraction of the muscles of Joe's arms, and he half raised his rifle.

His suspicions had come over him with greater force, and he felt half tempted to shoot Short in his tracks.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

Captain Sam had observed Joe's movement, and now asked this question in an earnest tone.

"Well, cap'n, unless I'm mistaken, you have been a entertainin' of a devil unawares, 'cause that ere Short—I think—is the Muskrat."

"And you let him go?" cried the captain.

"Yes," said Joe, coolly.

"And why?"

"'Cause I wasn't sure of it, and don't want to shed the blood of an innocent man by mistake."

"Call him back! Let's keep him with us so that we may have an eye on him," said the captain.

"Let him go," rejoined the pilot. "He can do us no harm so long's we keep our eyes peeled."

The captain yielded to the pilot's better judgment, and breaking camp, they were soon on their way up the river again.

Meanwhile their visitor of the night before was plodding on down the river. For half an hour he walked steadily onward, without pausing or looking back. Then, having crossed a knoll and disappeared on the other side, he threw himself flat on his stomach and crawled back to the crest.

Shielding his head behind the trunk of a tree, he laid there for nearly or quite half an hour, motionless as a log, save when he now and then peered back in the direction whence he had come.

At last he arose to his feet, a satisfied smile playing about his lips.

"I'm not followed," he muttered. "I bamboozled 'em completely, though I didn't altogether like the expression of the guide. So that's the Red River Pilot, as they calls him. Youngish-looking, but smart as a steel-trap, or I miss my reckoning. Couldn't get a word from him about his plans nohow. It makes mighty little difference, though, for I know just the spot to ambush 'em when they gets to the raft. There's just fourteen on 'em, not counting the dog. Fourteen new style government rifles! Won't old Evil-Eye's mouth water when he hears of it?"

Striking into an almost blind trail, running at right angles with the one he had been following, the Muskrat, for he it was, struck back into the country.

The garb he wore was as much that of an Indian as of a white man, and when he paused at last and covered his face with a red pigment, he was transformed into an Indian, the disguise being so thorough that few could have penetrated it.

Seeming to never tire, he traversed mile after mile, following paths through the woods that would have been invisible to any but a practiced eye, and two days later he

stalked into the midst of an Indian encampment. His entrance created a flutter, but none presumed to question him, for his bloody deeds and perfidy had gained him a position in the tribe second only to that of Evil-Eye. Toward the habitation of the latter he directed his steps, and encountering the chief at the entrance, he said, in the brief manner of the savages, using their guttural tongue:

"The Muskrat is here!"

"What news does he bring?"

"News that will delight the ears of the dreaded Evil-Eye, the greatest chief of his tribe."

This bit of flattery tickled the chief, although he tried hard to conceal his gratification.

"Then the Muskrat has learned where there are pale-faces whose blood the tomahawk and scalping-knife can drink?"

"I have. And there will be spoil also; fourteen good rifles for your young braves."

"The Muskrat is a great brave. Let him enter and smoke with the Evil-Eye."

The Indian chief was a fiend in appearance. His naturally coarse face was rendered more coarse from long and deep potations. He was cross-eyed, whence his name; and from forehead to chin one cheek had been laid open by a knife, leaving, when it healed, a hideous scar.

He was cruel, bloodthirsty, rapacious to the last degree. Woe to the paleface who fell into his hands. Better that he had never been born.

They were fitting companions, these two men, the white and the red. Evil-Eye was a Comanche, driven from his own tribe for some misdeed, and the braves he had gathered around him were the offscourings of various other tribes.

Evil-Eye was exultant when he learned that in the party selected as their prey was the Red River Pilot. Though driven from his own tribe, he never forgot that he was a Comanche, and remembering this, he particularly hated the Red River Pilot, whom he knew to be an inveterate foe to his tribe, and by whose hand alone—so report went—a hundred Comanche braves had bitten the dust.

"It is well," he grunted, when he heard all that the Muskrat had to say. "Let the Red River Pilot—Smooth-face, they call him—fall into my hands! He is a great brave—he shall die as becomes a great warrior."

A week from the day of the Muskrat's return there was a scene of much unusual bustle and excitement in the camp of Evil-Eye.

They were preparing for the war-path.

As day broke the following morning, a long file of Indians glided away through the woods, winding in and out among the trees like some large serpent, unerringly progressing toward a given point—a point which the exploring party must pass, and on foot at that.

At last the place of the destined ambush was reached, and at the order the Indians scattered among the trees, becoming, apparently, a portion of the forest and earth, so silent and motionless were they for hour after hour.

A scout who had been sent out returned with the report that the exploring party was fully ten miles away, and had gone into camp for the night.

"Wah!" grunted Evil-Eye. "It is good! Let the young men come forth. The palefaces will not be here till the sun rises again."

When day broke runners were sent out, and the Indians who remained behind concealed themselves in their ambush. An hour passed. A runner came hastily in. The palefaces were five miles away. A few minutes later came another runner. The palefaces were but four miles away. Then only three. Only two. Only one. Then only half a mile away.

With gleaming eyes they waited, patiently, motionless as dusky statues, weapons ready for the slaughter.

A few minutes passed. The silence was broken by the tread of feet.

And then——

Crack!

—— the ring of a rifle aroused the slumbering echoes of the woods.

A moment of intense silence, and then——

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE ALCALDE'S.

DAY after day the party under the lead of the Red River Pilot worked its way up the river.

It was about a week after their being visited by Bob Short, and as yet nothing had occurred to indicate that he had been other than he seemed to be.

"I guess that Short was all right, don't you think so, Joe?" inquired Captain Sam.

"It's too soon to say as yet."

"Why so? A week seems to me to be long enough for him to hatch up his deviltry if he was going to."

"So it would," was the reply. "But this ain't the section of country where he would put his deviltry into practice. He'd wait until we got up into the wilds."

"Into the wilds!" echoed Captain Sam; "what do you call this? If this ain't a wilderness, I never saw one."

"We calls this civilized," said Joe. "Why, capen, we're in Castile, now."

"Castile?"

"Yes, New Castile, the alcalde what governs here calls it. He's got an immense big house built with adobes; has a settlement about him of two hundred Spaniards, and keeps a dozen servants."

"And you say he governs here yet?"

"I do. France owned this country for three years, but during that time he ruled just as completely as he ever did, and nobody within ten miles around dared to say anything ag'in him. He carries things with a high hand yet, and draws and quarters every Yankee who falls in his way and is foolish enough to dispute his authority."

"He defies our government?" said the captain, in an incredulous tone.

"Snaps his fingers at it."

"We must take him down a peg."

"Look out that he don't take you down. He's a crafty old cuss, I tell yer."

"And when shall we reach this New Castile?"

"To-morrer."

Joe's description of the alcalde and his residence was a very fair one.

Senor Valasquez had purchased his governorship at a round price only a few years before Spain ceded the country to France, and before he had anywhere near got back the sum it cost him. Avaricious to the last degree, he had clung to his despotic authority in spite of the change of governments, the central power being always too far removed to reach the dastard.

At about the same hour when the conversation occurred between Joe and the captain, the alcalde was in a towering rage, not altogether unmixed with fear. He had just heard that a United States officer and a body of armed men were in the vicinity.

He foresaw the overthrow of his authority and the loss of the dollars he squeezed out of the miserable wretches who had been lured by specious promises to leave Spain and follow him to the New World.

He stamped, and swore, and paced the room, one minute shrieking with anger, at another paling with fear lest punishment should now be visited on him for his past misdeeds.

"What, ho, there, Ricardo!" he cried, angrily, and a trembling wretch presented himself.

"I am here, sir," said Ricardo, humbly.

"You saw these men with your own eyes?"

"I did."

"Two in the uniform of officers?"

"Yes."

"How many do they number in all?"

"Fourteen."

"Ha!" and a gleam of something like savage satisfaction crossed the alcalde's face. "I had thought there were more—a regiment—and that they had come to establish the new government. Ha! let me think. Go, Ricardo, but remain within call."

The trembling servant withdrew.

The alcalde walked up and down the room like a caged tiger for some minutes.

Then, with a face working with some fiendish purpose he called Ricardo again.

"Send Andres here!"

"Si, senor."

In a few minutes a sallow complexioned Spaniard, with long, coarse black hair and piercing black eyes, entered the room.

"Andres, would you like to make fifty dollars?"

Would he? The Spaniard's eyes snapped with greediness, and his face answered the question.

For nearly half an hour the alcalde and his tool remained in close conversation.

Then Andres withdrew, and leaving the house, plunged into the woods.

It was long after dark before he returned, carrying in his hand a small bundle of roots and twigs.

He paused to speak to the alcalde, then withdrew to his own room in the huge adobe building.

From this he emerged stealthily just after midnight. Advancing a step or two, then pausing to listen, then glancing swiftly about, he stole through the hall and from the house.

Once in the large area outside, inclosed by a strong stockade, he bent his head to listen.

He could hear naught but the monotonous, steady foot-fall of the guard pacing on his post before the gate of the stockade.

A devilish smile crossed his face.

"It will be earned," he muttered, referring to the promised reward.

Stealing softly across the inclosed ground he finally paused before the stockade at a certain point. His purpose was soon apparent. One of the palisades was movable, and would give him egress without the knowledge of the guard at the gate.

Passing through, he restored the stockade to its usual appearance.

Then pausing again for an instant to listen, he softly glided away, moving as noiselessly as a shadow.

Two minutes later he was in the rear of one of the huts grouped outside of the stockade.

Like a snake he glided around it and to its door. A moment was spent in listening, and then he placed his hand against the door. It yielded to his touch.

The soft breathing of some sleeping person—a woman—was all that met his ear.

There was nothing to fear. The husband was from home at that hour—sent out of the way purposely by the alcalde—and the only occupants of the hut were a woman and her young babe of a few days old.

The fiend glided into the hut, and reaching the bedside, lifted the child from beside its mother.

His rough treatment brought a whimper to the infant's lips, and, with an inward oath, he drew his keen dagger across the babe's throat, and then softly began beating his retreat.

Outside of the door he came to a halt, and producing a small tin cup, let it fill with the blood which gushed from the babe's gashed throat.

Then, as a cry of alarm came from the mother's lips as she missed her child, he hastily deposited the slaughtered babe on the ground before the door, swiftly left the spot, and, unseen, reached his own room again.

He had a fire of charcoal burning in his room. Over this he now placed an earthen vessel, and dumped into it the blood and the roots and herbs he had gathered that afternoon.

He was concocting a deadly poison.

"First half a pint of blood from a babe less than a week old," he read from a paper he held in his hands. "Into that put the roots, and boil over a charcoal fire half an hour."

"Then put in a live lizard."

"In ten minutes add the entrails of a frog."

"Then stir."

"Then put in the toe-nails of a cat."

"Stir again."

"Next, a rattlesnake's tail."

"Stir again for five minutes."

"Now, two hairs from the head of the child who spilled the blood."

"Stir slowly and carefully."

"Now the fangs of a snake."

"Stir again."

"Last of all, a dozen live spiders. Then take it off, strain it and cool it, and the poison is done."

It was a horrible, yet a fascinating sight, to watch the Spaniard at this ghoulish work of concocting this hideous poison; with a gusto that cannot be described, he threw into the boiling mess the living lizard, and then watched its dying struggles, emblematical, in his mind, of the dying struggles of those to whom the poison was to be administered.

And every time he stirred the stuff he muttered some cabalistic words, which were believed to increase the potency of the poison he was brewing.

It must have been a human fiend who got up that horrible formula.

The truth of the matter was, that the active principle of the poison was a plant called "deadly nightshade," and all the rest amounted to nothing. Yet this Andres, ignorant, superstitious, had supposed all this mummary necessary, and had gone to a great deal of trouble, and murdered an infant. Perhaps he enjoyed it, and would have gone through it all even had he known better.

"Add the entrails of a frog!" he had read, and with his keen dagger he destroyed the life of a frog, ripped him open with a chuckle, and threw the quivering entrails into the steaming earthen vessel.

The horrible brew was furnished at last. Then he took it from above the fire and strained it carefully, the amount of liquid being half a dozen table-spoonfuls.

It was well on toward morning before he had cooled it and corked it securely in a vial.

The sun was several hours high when he went to the alcalde's room.

"It is done," said Andres, with a grim smile.

"There is enough of it to poison fifteen men."

"Yes, forty."

"Let me have it," said the alcalde, in an eager tone; and when he had the vial in his hands he gave the murderous poison-brewer the promised reward.

Andres bowed, and clutching the gold tightly, made his exit from the room with a smile on his evil face.

The alcalde laughed harshly.

"This will settle the business. I only want one more year here as alcalde, and then, the Yankees can have the blasted country. Only one more year, and I shall go back home to Spain, wealthy—wealthy enough to make me a grandee; Hey, Ricardo—Ricardo!"

"Here, senor."

"Go find these Americans, and say I bid them a welcome to this house—and to death," he added to himself, in an undertone.

And then he resumed his walk to and fro across the room, talking aloud to himself, unaware that other ears heard than his own. His daughter, Inez, dark-skinned,

lustrous eyed, beautiful as a poet's dream, sat in the adjoining room.

As she heard her father's words, and began to comprehend their full import, every vestige of the rich color in her cheeks faded away, and she became deathly pale. For a minute or two she seemed unable to move, and then she summoned up all her strength and escaped from the room, aware, that should he discover that she had overheard, he would not hesitate to take her life.

They had never loved each other. The mother of Inez had been the connecting link between the father and child, and now that that mother was no more, Inez gave him the duty of a child, but not the love.

She knew her father was cruel, unjust; in fact, he had been both to her. But she had never dreamed that he would stoop to such wholesale murder.

In her own room the poor girl dropped on her knees before the shrine of the Virgin, and prayed long and earnestly.

Then arising, the frightened look on her face gave place to one of resolution, and she murmured to herself:

"Even though I die myself for it, he shall not commit this awful crime!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEFEATED ALCALDE.

"THERE'S somebody on the bank calling to us," said Captain Sam, turning to call the pilot's attention.

But Joe had already clapped his eyes upon the individual, and was scrutinizing him closely.

"It's a greaser, one of the alcalde's, burn me if it isn't!" he said a moment later.

"I suppose we might as well hear what the fellow has to say?"

"Yes," assented Joe.

The skiffs were turned shoreward, and within a very few minutes were close enough to easily hold conversation with the man on the bank.

It was Ricardo.

He spoke in a sort of mongrel Spanish and French combined.

"You understand the lingo, don't you, Joe? What does he say?"

"He presents the compliments of his master, Senor Velasquez, who begs the honor of our company whenever it suits our convenience. Mighty obliging, I'm sure," he added, on his own account.

"Tell him, Joe, that we acknowledge with thanks the kind invitation of his master, and will be with him some time this afternoon."

Joe interpreted the captain's words.

Ricardo grunted to signify that he understood, and disappearing up the bank, started homeward on a dog trot.

The skiffs once more returned to the center of the stream, and the captain kept note-book and pencil in constant use.

It was in the middle of the afternoon that they arrived at a point opposite to the alcalde's residence, which was situated about a mile from the shore.

Joe smiled meaningly as they stepped from the skiffs.

"Of course, cap'n, yer'll leave a guard with the boats?"

"Pshaw! Do you consider it necessary?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"There's no telling, but the alcalde's invitation struck me as being too polite *for him*, unless there was something back of it. It'd be just like the old rascal to get us ashore, and then have our boats stolen."

"In that case we'll leave a guard of a certainty," said the captain, and for this purpose two of their number were left behind.

When near the alcalde's house, Joe called the captain's attention, and took occasion to say:

"Cap'n, a word to the wise is sufficient. Don't you trust this Spaniard one inch."

"Why?"

"Why?" repeated Joe. "You're always a-*why*-ing of me, cap'n. Can't you believe what I say without axing so many questions? Why should I warn you not to trust him except for his being rascally and treacherous?"

"Well, you needn't be so touchy about it. But, here's the house in sight and the alcalde coming to meet us."

With many expressions of friendship and good-will the wily old Spaniard shook the captain and Lasher by the hand. The others were subordinates and he did not deign to notice them further than by a bow.

"Welcome to my mansion, gentlemen," he said, as he bowed them within the gates of the stockade. "Here are easy chairs beneath these trees, and also hammocks. Will you rest here or will you enter the house?"

"For the present we will rest here," replied the captain, in an equally polite tone.

"You are tired, I can see; you have traveled far. I hope you are bearers of no ill news. Spain and the States are at peace?"

"They are."

"And ever should be!" said the alcalde, in a manner savoring almost of piety. "In half an hour, gentlemen, I shall be honored by your presence at a little refreshment, to give some orders for which, please excuse me."

"I don't like it," muttered Joe, "I don't like it. There's something in the wind, sure. But what?"

He could not rest.

While the others laid off and enjoyed themselves, he was on his feet and walking uneasily about.

Once, as he chanced to look up at the house, he thought he caught a glimpse of a just disappearing figure of a female at a window. But that was hardly singular, although what was so, was the cautiously spoken words which fell from the lips of an aged negro woman a few minutes later:

"Foller me, honey, but don' let 'em see you'se do it."

"I understand," replied Joe, in a low tone, and it was not until she was some distance away, that, with his hands in his pockets, and whistling softly, he followed her.

It was to her own habitation that the negress led him, situated within thirty feet of the adobe building, but concealed from it by some luxuriantly growing vines.

"Well, aunty, what is it?" he inquired in a low tone, when once inside of the hut.

"Don' you'se see?" crowed the old negress.

Yes, Joe did see then.

"Bar Creek!" exclaimed Joe.

Inez, for she it was, smiled.

"I see you remember me," she said in a low, sweet tone, the soft Spanish words seeming to fall from her tongue like the music of rippling water. "You saved my life then, Senor Americano, and now"—her voice trembled—"I would save yours and those of your companions."

"What! How so? Are we in danger here, then?"

"Great danger. The alcalde intends to poison you all. Fly from this place at once, and above all do not drink any liquor from the silver tankard with the deer's-head on top, for it is *poisoned*!"

"My God, can it be true?"

"It is true," she sadly said. "Hasten back now, ere you be too late."

"But your name!" exclaimed Joe. "Tell me your name, now, will you not? That day at Bar Creek I had no more than rescued you when a man drove up, and you went off with him. Senorita, since that day your eyes have haunted my soul. I have longed to see you again, and——" Joe paused, a dread having entered his heart; it had never occurred to him before: "Perhaps you are a wife?"

She shook her head.

"Ha! not? and your name?"

"Inez!"

"Beautiful name—fit for so divine a creature!" cried Joe; and he would have kissed the beautiful girl then and there had she not eluded him.

"Go!" she said, appealingly. "Go! The lives of your companions are in your hands."

These words recalled Joe to himself, and, hastily bidding her good-by, he adopted an easy, sauntering style, and strolled back to where he had left his companions.

It was too late to warn them.

They were even then entering the cool dining room of the alcalde's house.

"Pray be seated, gentlemen," politely said their host, motioning the captain to one seat beside his own and Lasher to the other.

Ere the lieutenant could take this place of honor, Joe glided in front of him and coolly took the seat.

"You're in my place, sir," said Lasher, angrily.

"Am I?" said Joe, coolly. "Well, it's as good as any other, so I guess I'll keep it."

Lasher would have raised a row only for receiving a glance from the captain.

As it was, he took the seat next the captain, on the opposite side of the table from the pilot.

"The silver tankard with the deer's head on it," Joe mentally repeated, looking up and down the table. "Ah! there it is—the servant is just bringing it in."

The servant, who had received his instructions, was in the act of taking it to his master, when Joe, starting suddenly, as if he had just observed the tankard, exclaimed:

"Ah! this is the wine you were just praising, senor! Thank you, I don't mind if I do try it," and he deliberately took it from the servant's hand.

The alcalde, the captain, Lasher, and all the men, were aghast at this breach of etiquette. It was the captain's right to be served first.

Captain Sam's eyes flashed, and bending toward the alcalde, who was angry looking, he whispered:

"Don't mind him, senor, he's only a boor."

Joe's cheeks flushed, for he overheard the words. But he knew what he was about.

He filled his glass, and then glancing toward the captain, coolly asked:

"Will you try some, captain?"

Captain Sam stretched forth his hand to take the tankard. His fingers had hardly touched it when Joe let go. The vessel dropped with a crash, and from its wide throat the ruby wine flowed in a broad stream.

Every drop was spilled save what Joe had in his glass.

The alcalde's face was white with passion. Captain Sam's was flushed for the same reason.

"You awkward lout!" he cried, angrily. "You deserve to be horsewhipped for this."

The pilot gritted his teeth, but uttered no word in his defense.

The Spaniard knew not what to do for a moment. Here his plan had miscarried through the awkwardness of a dolt.

But it would never do to let them see him too disconcerted, and smothering his passions the best he was able, he ordered more wine. It was brought, the others filled their glasses and a toast was proposed.

"Spain and America, may they always be friendly."

One single instant something drew away the alcalde's attention. Quick as a flash Joe exchanged glasses with him. Captain Sam saw it done, saw a set, stern look on the pilot's face that he had never before seen it wear.

"Spain and America!" said one and all, tossing off the wine.

Not more than two minutes had elapsed ere the alcalde turned white as a corpse. His eyes began to roll, and the muscles of his face to twitch, while every other muscle became rigid and unyielding.

He started up with a yell of terror, and fastened his gaze on Joe inquiringly

"Exchanged glasses with you, senor," said Joe, coolly. "It doesn't seem to agree with you. In short, it looks as if the liquor had been poisoned."

Velasquez understood it all, now, and knew that no earthly power could save his life. He sprang back from the table, and like a madman dashed about the room until his stiffening limbs refused to carry him further.

Then he paused and stood for one moment erect, his eyes starting from their sockets, his lips covered with froth, his teeth gnashing, agonized cries gurgling up from his throat.

Then he fell heavily to the floor. For a minute or two he laid quietly; then managing to break the spell of the drug, he thrashed the stone floor wildly, beating his head and heels with maniac strength, after which a convulsive throe or two swept his body from head to foot and he became silent and motionless in death.

Joe was the first to break the horrified silence which succeeded.

"Captain Sam—lout as I am—that is what I saved you from," pointing at the alcalde's body.

CHAPTER VIII.

EVIL-EYE'S BAND.

Not a man who listened to the stern words of the pilot but shuddered at thought of how close they had been to a horrible death.

They now all understood the meaning of Joe's unwarrantable breach of etiquette; understood that his apparent awkwardness was a well-executed design.

The single servant who had been present had fled from the room when he saw the alcalde fall.

He now returned, his own face, and the faces of those who accompanied him, blanched and horrified.

None seemed to know what to do; Captain Sam did not feel willing to assume the power of giving orders. At last he turned to one of the trembling servants:

"Surely there is somebody in the house belonging to him—he has a wife or children?"

"Only Senorita Inez."

"Inez!" gasped Joe.

The word near strangled him.

Every eye was turned toward him.

"Inez! My God—her father!"

The knowledge staggered the poor fellow, and he wilted into his seat.

But in a minute he was on his feet. Inez had been called—was coming—he could even then hear the rustle of her dress. He—he—who had murdered her father—dared not look her in the face.

He turned and hurried swiftly from the room, nor paused until he was beyond the stockade, where he flung himself down with a hollow moan, for the time being thoroughly unmanned.

Captain Sam started at sight of the beautiful girl; such a vision of loveliness he had never before seen.

At a single glance she understood what had occurred. Her father had alone fallen a victim to the horrible scheme he had concocted.

"Come, boys!" said Captain Sam, not wishing to intrude on her sorrow, and he led his men from the house and into the grounds.

Those dark and lustrous eyes were dimmed with tears. Not that she sorrowed much for her father's death, but rather because he had died in the midst of such wickedness—died without a chance for prayer and repentance, died without the offices of the church.

She did not send for Captain Sam, and he finally departed with his men.

He had no business there.

She had advisers, of course, he thought; and, to tell the truth, he rather feared the influence of those soft dark

eyes—they might make him forget the allegiance he owed to a pretty girl in the States.

Half way to the boats they came across the pilot.

He arose as they approached, and facing the captain, said in a cold, measured tone:

Captain Sam, here we part company. If there is anything as I kin do for yer, in the way of giving yer directions or getting another guide for yer, I'll do it willingly. But as for me, I don't budge another foot in yer company."

The almost insolent tone used by the pilot angered the captain.

But the next moment his anger vanished. He had called Joe a "lout." He said he "deserved horsewhipping." In Joe's place he would certainly have felt hurt.

"Come—come, Joe," he said, pleasantly, "what's the use of getting riled, and staying riled over a few hasty words? Come, man, fall in with us. Don't be foolish. Say no more, but come on."

"I axed yer a plain question, Capen Sam. Can I help yer to get another guide or give yer any directions?" and the pilot's eyes were hard as adamant.

"Do you really mean to leave us now?" said Captain Sam, in a troubled tone.

"I do."

"And will nothing induce you to stay with us? Will fifty dollars cover——"

"Money? Bah! What do I care for money?"

"Is there anything that will induce you to change your mind?"

"There is one thing, and only one."

"And that?"

"As broad an apology, as your insult was broad."

"An apology! Do you know who you are talking to?"

"Yes. Sam Jones. A no better man than myself, and if he thinks he is and would like to settle it in a manly way, why just say the word."

Captain Sam eyed the pilot. He was no ordinary man, thinking more of a dollar than he did of his honor. He was as fine grained as himself. And the captain adopted the honorable course when he stepped forward, and said:

"We fight?—never, Joe, never, while I am in my senses. What, stand up and try to kill the man who saved my life? Joe, I spoke harshly to you in the presence of these men, and in their presence now, I take back all I said, and ask your pardon for what has passed—that is, if you will take me by the hand and promise never to hold any hard feelings toward me."

"That I will," said Joe, warmly.

The hands of the two men met, and all that was bitter in the past was forgiven and forgotten.

Reaching the boats, they made a few miles more before dark, and then camped on a little natural lawn which extended to the river's edge, for the night.

Joe never referred to their adventure in the alcalde's house, though the men frequently spoke of it among themselves, and wondered why Joe had been so affected by the name of Inez. But they were kept in the dark, for the pilot's only confidant was Maje.

They were working well up the river now. In two days more they would fetch Grand Ecore, from which point the Red river was choked up by the "raft," which extended nearly or quite sixty miles.

At the time calculated upon, the exploring party reached the beginning of the "raft."

This, as probably many of our readers are aware, so called "raft" was a collection of timber brought down by the spring freshets. Originally, one tree perhaps found a lodgment; this in time was prevented from going on down stream, and year by year the raft had grown by accretions at the upper end, until for a distance of about sixty miles the surface of the river was one mass of timber, and could be crossed dry shod at any point. The current ran beneath it.

The raft reached, the exploring party disembarked, and after taking everything of value from the skiffs, hid them in the brush on the north bank of the river.

Packing up everything, each man carrying his portion, they started on their tramp to the upper end of the raft, where Joe had provided a flat-bottomed boat for them, since above that point the river had a depth of from two to three feet only.

And it was at a point on the trail that the exploring party would take to pass the "raft," that Evil-Eye and his confederate, the Muskrat, had planted their ambush.

The pilot had reconnoitered the trail well before starting. No Indians had traveled it of which there were now any traces left. Besides, this part of the country was ordinarily considered safe, there being a distance of fully two hundred miles before reaching what might be termed the Indian country.

Still, it was not best to be careless, and taking the lead himself, he kept his eyes and ears both open; but as the reader knows, was unaware that Evil-Eye's scouts were constantly falling back before him. Not a sound of an alarming nature was heard, not a thing of any kind was seen to arouse Joe's suspicions.

He was unconsciously walking into the trap prepared for him by his wily foes.

At last he was within five hundred yards of the ambush, and even yet had no suspicion of its presence.

Then came a sudden low cry of alarm from Lasher, and the others saw a rifle fly to his shoulder.

Joe's eyes leaped in the direction in which the aim was taken, and there saw standing in an arch of the trees, the magnificent form of a powerful Indian. He saw the rifle aimed at him, and with an impressive wave of his hand tried to warn Lasher not to fire.

But Lasher would not heed it.

Joe glanced at him, saw that his finger was pressing the trigger, and with a low cry of disgust he flung himself to Lasher's side and knocked up the barrel of the rifle.

Crack!

And the bullet flew high above the Indian's head.

"Fool!" hissed the pilot. "Let no man raise hand against that Indian! Ha! I fear that shot will be our ruin. What is up Mahtoree?" as that Indian came swiftly from the trees and stepped by his side.

"Cover—quick. Hatchet dig up—Evil-Eye's face got war-paint—cover right away quick—ambush right dere—six—ten—two panther spring away."

Joe turned like a flash. Ere the Indian finished he had comprehended all.

"Fall back—for God's sake!—and be as rapid and noiseless as possible. Quick—or we may be too late——"

Anything else he might have added was drowned in an appalling and fearful warwhoop, combined with the crack of rifles and the whizz of bullets.

CHAPTER IX.

IN EVIL-EYE'S HANDS.

THE shot fired by Lasher informed Evil-Eye that something had happened other than had been planned for. He thought it more than likely that one of his party had been discovered by the palefaces.

As soon as he could get the better of his chagrin he ordered his party to break cover and swoop down upon the palefaces.

Brief as was the intervening space of time between the rifle shot and the yell of the Indians, Joe had made good use of it. Most of his party had known enough to shelter themselves behind trees, while he, Mahtoree, and Captain Sam, the latter having done a little Indian fighting, had found cover within a very few feet of each other.

"How's this, Joe?" called Captain Sam, in a low tone. "This is a surprise, and no mistake."

"Hist!" whispered the pilot; "make no noise, capen,

but keep your peepers open, and when you gets a square sight at a top-knot, and are sure of yer man, let drive."

Yelling like fiends, Evil-Eye's band rushed from their covert.

They had expected to come upon the palefaces thrown into confusion by their whoop and volley, but finding, instead, a silence as dead as the grave, they hushed their clamor.

Instinctively every man of them dropped flat upon his stomach, and then began creeping stealthily forward like a snake; their glittering black eyes could be seen sparkling in every bush like twin stars.

Finally, one fellow, growing impatient at the long silence, boldly raised his head to obtain a good look ahead of him.

Crack!

It was Joe's rifle that spoke, and beneath his unerring aim the Indian fell to the earth—a bullet in his brain.

Then silence succeeded, a silence long and profound. Not a movement was made by anybody in either party.

"I don't like this," muttered Joe, uneasily. "They wouldn't be so quiet in front unless something was in the wind. Wonder if they ain't trying now to flank us?"

Advancing his head as far as he dared from behind the tree, he scanned the bushes carefully.

Then he uttered a low exclamation, quickly aimed, and fired. An Indian leaped high in air, then fell with a thud and remained motionless.

Still the Indians made no attempt to dash in upon them.

"We must retreat," muttered Joe. "Capen—capen!" he called, in a low tone.

"Ay—ay, Joe; what is it?"

"Get down on your belly and retreat, feet first, allers keepin' yer face towards the Injins."

"And you?"

"Oh, me and Mahtoree can take care of ourselves. And, capen, if yer can git a hundred feet or so away with the boys, make a bold retreat. I'll jine yer at the proper time."

"All right," answered Captain Sam, and, dropping on his stomach, he did as the pilot had suggested.

One Indian was so situated that he could see Captain Sam crawling over the ground, yet he dared not try a shot at him, for in doing so he would have been compelled to expose himself.

This Indian grew more and more uneasy as he saw Captain Sam's nearer approach to safety. At last, he could stand it no longer, and running out his rifle he aimed, and—

Another rifle than his own cracked.

It was that of Mahtoree.

The finger that would have pulled the trigger was stiffening now in death.

The pilot was watching the captain's retreating form. When the captain had plunged into a clump of heavy undergrowth, where the rest of the men had sought cover, Joe made a significant motion to Mahtoree.

Wilting to the ground, they struck off at right angles, crawling on their stomachs, and trailing their rifles behind them.

Fortune befriended them, and though thirty pairs of keen eyes were watching for them, their movements were undiscovered; and, after they were gone, the Indians still watched the two trees from behind which fatal shots had come.

Captain Sam had no sooner reached his party than he softly ordered them to beat a retreat, and above all, to keep together. As we have said, he knew something about Indian fighting, and the danger of a flank movement had been in his mind from the very first moment.

On the right side of them the undergrowth was much heavier than on the left. Consequently the right flank

would be the one the Indians would attempt to turn, as it afforded the best cover.

All this the captain saw at a glance, and instead of a backward retreat he turned to the left and went off in a line parallel with the position of Evil-Eye's band.

Meanwhile Joe was busy. After getting far enough away, so as not to be too easily heard, he arose to his feet, and taking care to leave a very plain and confused trail—which they could not tell if one pair of feet or a dozen had made—he started off on a dog trot.

He went fully two miles before he stopped. Then he began to retrace his steps, stepping lightly in his own tracks, until he reached a flat rock of considerable extent.

On this he paused a minute to take his bearings, and then made a wide detour, the end of which would be to bring him out somewhere near the place of the ambush.

By the greatest good fortune he stumbled across Captain Sam on his retreat. A log laid across the ground at about the place they would pass. Beside this, Joe threw himself, and awaited their approach.

"Wagh!"

Captain Sam's face paled a little as he heard this exclamation right in his ear.

"How did you get here?" he demanded, in surprise, as he recognized the pilot.

"Left to yourselves, you fellers 'ud stand mighty little chance of saving yer ha'r," was the reply. "In sich a time as this, yer wants to believe every log an Injin, and that every tree conceals another. But foller me now."

"But you are leading right back toward the Indians!"

"I know it."

"I suppose it's all right?"

"I 'spect it is," said Joe, impatiently. "And be lively, too, for we've got no time to waste. It's getting hard on to dark now."

The pilot led them back fully a mile, to where a stream crossed the path they had been pursuing.

Into this stream Joe stepped, and began to wade up it. It was scarcely more than a brook, the water reaching barely above the ankles. For a mile he kept them walking in the stream, by which time they had entered a piece of exceedingly rough and stony land.

Leaving the stream here, Joe piloted them a distance of nearly half a mile, and then, with a low: "Come on, boys," he raised a mass of tangled vines and dove beneath it.

What was their surprise to find that the vine served to screen from sight a cozy and comfortable little cottage or hut.

"This is my headquarters," observed Joe, noticing the captain's surprised look. "This is my home. Make yourselves as comfortable as possible, but don't destroy anything. Now, captain, I must leave yer. Get along without a fire if yer can, but if yer must have one, be careful and don't let a single stick of wet wood go on."

With these last words of warning Joe disappeared. He had performed a great feat in bringing his party safely off from the clutches of such a murderous band as the Evil-Eye's. But he well knew that they were not absolutely safe yet, and he was now about to return and watch the Indians.

"Easy, Mage, easy," he said, checking the animal, who seemed disposed to bound away at a livelier pace than suited his master.

It was dark by this time, and the only guide he had was his sense of hearing, and the acuteness of his faithful canine companion.

Finally he paused, and bent his head as if trying to recall something. He and Mahtoree had agreed to meet at a blasted oak, a tree known to them both, and Joe was trying to recall its exact location.

"It must be right ahead here," he muttered. "If it ain't, then the Red River Pilot's losing all the woodcraft he ever learned."

Cautiously each step was taken, while his ears were always open to catch any suspicious sound. But nothing occurred to alarm either himself or Maje, and at last he stood in sight of the blasted oak.

He uttered the plaintive cry of a night-bird, and then paused to listen. Back came a reply from the vicinity of the oak.

"Ah! Mahtoree is here first," thought Joe, and at once he started forward.

He was within a dozen feet of the oak when suddenly Maje uttered one short, sharp yelp.

It was his cry of warning.

"Danger!" exclaimed Joe, and would have bounded back whence he came.

But too late.

"Wah-hoo!" grunted a savage, and in a single second Joe was surrounded by dusky forms which seemed to rise from out of the earth, so thoroughly were the bodies of the Indians blended with its color in the darkness.

There was no gainsaying the fact—at last the Red River Pilot was a prisoner, and a prisoner at that to the wily, crafty, and fiendish Evil-Eye.

CHAPTER X.

THE WATER DRIP.

At first Joe spoke a few reproachful words to Maje: "Your nose can't be as keen as it used to be," he said. But a minute later he did the brute justice: "I take it all back, Maje; I didn't give yer a chance. We approached from the wrong side, and yer didn't get the wind of the varmints."

Such was the truth.

Had they approached from the other side, so that the breeze which was stirring had first struck the Indians, Maje would not have failed him. But as it was, the scent was carried away from Maje instead of toward him.

"Away, Maje, away, old boy!" ordered the pilot, in a low tone.

But the order was heard by one who understood English perfectly—the Muskrat—and by his order, in the Indian tongue, the dog was secured.

"Does the Smoothface surrender?" demanded Evil-Eye.

Joe knew that resistance would be useless, and thinking his chances would be better after a while than now, he answered in the affirmative, first taking care to drop his rifle; he caught it on his foot, and then allowed it to reach the ground without making any noise. He would not have lost his rifle for the world; by leaving it here it might be discovered by Mahtoree, who would take care of it, and, understanding the significance of its being there, would take steps to rescue him.

As the pilot had intended, the Indians who did the flanking finally rushed forward, yelling like the devils they were, while those in front raised an answering cry to crush the palefaces between the two parties. But the whites had crawled out sidewise, and the two parties of Indians met each other instead of the palefaces enclosed between them, in confusion, ready to fall an easy prey.

The pilot's intentions were carried out in another respect. The Indians struck upon and followed the false trail; but with a shrewdness that seems almost wonderful, discovered the fraud when they reached the stream. Naturally, they would have followed it, but Evil-Eye saw that the palefaces had not ascended or descended it.

He judged from this reason.

The current was very sluggish and the bottom muddy. Had a party of men entered it the water would have been soily and muddy.

"It is a false trail!" he angrily said. "Let us go back."

Chance alone had guided their steps to the tree. Here they had paused for a consultation, being completely at fault. The sound of a twig, which cracked under Joe's

feet, put them on the alert, and it was Evil-Eye himself who replied to the call of the night bird.

Without discovering that Joe's rifle was missing, they marched him away, leaving behind at the tree two of their number to capture the person whom the pilot had expected to meet.

His arms were taken from him and he was bound hand and foot.

In this condition he passed the night.

Meanwhile Indian scouts had been spread out in all directions in search of the hiding-place of the palefaces.

Joe smiled sarcastically as one after another returned, non-success written in his face.

The sun was about an hour high when two Indians approached the spot where Joe was lying.

From their manner and bearing he knew them to be high in authority. As they came nearer he recognized one of them as Evil-Eye, and the other—his figure looked familiar.

This Indian finally shifted the rifle he carried. It was a small action, but it was sufficient for Joe. An Indian, no matter how well acquainted with the use of a rifle, always handles it awkwardly.

The second Indian was no Indian at all, but a white man disguised as one.

"A white man," muttered Joe, an expression of contempt crossing his fine face.

"Smoothface great warrior," grunted Evil-Eye, as he and his companion paused before the pilot.

"Well?" said Joe.

"But not great warrior as Evil-Eye."

"Of course not."

"Smoothface say Evil-Eye great warrior. Smoothface no got crooked tongue. No paleface warrior great as Smoothface—only one," remembering the renegade at his side.

"Well, what is all this palaver about?" demanded Joe. "Be done with it as soon as possible."

"Smoothface heap smart—not so smart as Evil-Eye. Tink he hide paleface friend, so Evil-Eye no find him. Heap wrong, tink. Evil-Eye know where is—go bimeby—pretty soon—kill—scalp—all."

"You lie, Evil-Eye," said Joe, plumply. "Yer don't know where they are, nor yer can't find 'em, nuther."

A scowl came over the Indian's face at finding that he could not deceive the pilot.

"Den Smoothface tell Evil-Eye where friend is," said the wily chief.

"Never!"

"Yes, do as heap great warrior say," said the disguised white man.

"And you'd best drop your Indian-English and speak your mother tongue," retorted Joe. "I know yer, Muskrat, and was nigh sure enough of it when yer came to our camp to put a bullet in yer noddle."

"Since yer know me, then," said the Muskrat, dropping all attempts at concealing his identity, "yer'd better do as the chief says. Tell him whar ye took them friends o' yourn and he'll let ye go. If yer don't—well—ye've heard summat, no doubt, of Evil-Eye."

"Yes, and of his far worse companion, the renegade white man, the bloody Muskrat."

An angry light leaped into the Muskrat's eyes.

"Well, we don't perpose ter waste much breath on yer," he said, in a brutal tone. "Will yer save yer own carcass by leading us ter whar t'other party is?"

"No."

"Then we'll try ter bring yer to tarms, that's all," said the Muskrat, significantly.

Fifteen minutes later Joe was lifted to his feet, and fastened in an erect position to a tree.

Then a piece of alder, with the pith punched out, was fastened above his head. And then, through this alder tube a stream of water was set flowing.

Joe had heard of this devilish contrivance before, the result—not of Indian brains, but the devilish contrivance of the white renegade—and he had heard it spoken of as being torture of the most dreadful kind.

He did not think it could be true, so grateful and cooling was the water as it first splashed on his head.

But he was forming a judgment too soon; as he found out before very long.

The first intimation he had of what was in store for him, was when an intense pain, something like a stitch in the side, flashed across his eyeballs. It was gone, however, as quickly as it came.

An instant later came just such another, more intense. It felt as if a red-hot wire had been suddenly stretched tightly across his eyes.

Splash!—splash!—splash! went the water. Drip!—drip!—drip!

Then—slowly but steadily—his head seemed to be drawing in toward the center, and there forming a little hard ball. Slowly—steadily—as if in a vise.

Then the ball seemed to burst with fearful force, a chill ran through his frame, every hair seemed rising on end, his eyes seemed about to shoot like bullets from his head, and his skull seemed splitting beneath the intense strain of some pent up power which he could not escape.

Then again—slowly, steadily—his head seemed shrinking again into that little hard ball. He awaited the reaction with a horrible dread, with the perspiration oozing from every pore.

It was horrible!

“Will you cave?” asked the Muskrat, but Joe only glared at him for reply.

Again the ball seemed to burst, and it tore a cry of anguish from Joe. Strong man as he was, he could not help it.

Again, and more intensely than before, his head began to shrink. Tighter and tighter, harder and harder, became the ball in his brain. It was so hard and tense this time that it could not burst, which, painful as it was, Joe now prayed for, for it could not be half so horrible as that feeling of knotting.

Tighter—tighter; Joe shrieked with anguish. The pain was driving him crazy.

“Will yer cave?” demanded the Muskrat.

Joe faintly comprehended.

“No—no!” he yelled. “Oh, God, let me die! Curse you—oh, you fiend, you devil, you monster!”

The last word died away in a sort of wild wail. The Muskrat glanced quickly at the pilot's face, then sprang forward and knocked aside the alder tube.

Too late! Joe's head sank forward on his chest, blood gushed from his nose, and even appeared in his eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER THE RAFT.

THEY cut the pilot's bonds and laid him on the ground. At first the Muskrat thought he had been killed, but a minute's examination convinced him to the contrary.

“He will be all right——”

The Muskrat paused, for at that instant there rang through the woods the report of a rifle, followed by a wild shriek of mortal agony.

The shot came from a point a few hundred yards away, and Evil-Eye bounded to his feet, and with his braves dashed toward the spot, leaving the Muskrat alone with the pilot.

Joe's consciousness returned at a moment when the Muskrat's attention was directed toward the returning figure of Evil-Eye, followed by his men bearing the body of an Indian.

“Mahtoree!” exclaimed the pilot, mentally. “He was prowling about trying to rescue me, and has met a violent death.”

Then a desperate light flashed into his eyes. The Muskrat did not yet know that he was conscious.

With a bound he was on his feet, and then he dashed away toward the river followed by a wild yell and a dozen bullets.

In a single second the body of Mahtoree was dropped, and they were all in full pursuit.

His recent terrible ordeal had robbed him of much of his strength, and they were hard at his heels before he reached the river. They could have shot him, and would have done so but for the sharp order of Evil-Eye to take him alive, the Indians believing it could be easily done.

But he did not know Joe.

“He will try to cross the raft!” cried Evil-Eye, in his own tongue.

That seemed what Joe was up to, as he intended they should believe.

He bounded from log to log, and tree to tree, over the little patches of water showing between, until he reached the center of the river.

Here he seemed to make a false step, for he suddenly fell into one of the holes with which the raft abounded;

This was the signal for a wild yell of triumph from the Indians.

They would be upon him before he could arise. They were certain, now, of his capture.

But he did not try to arise.

They saw nothing of him, and when they reached the hole, he was not clinging on the edge as they had expected.

He was gone!

A howl of disappointment filled the air, but a few sharp words from Evil-Eye silenced them.

The chief was no common Indian, being many degrees sharper and shrewder than most denizens of the forest.

What the others took to be simply an accident whereby the pilot had been drowned, instead of falling into their clutches, he saw what might easily be a sharp plan formed by Joe to escape them.

A minute later the entire band was scattering over the raft, an Indian stationing himself at each hole, knife in hand, ready to kill or capture Joe in case this was a ruse, and he arose for breath.

But they were dealing with a man whom even the Muskrat had said “was smart as a steel trap.”

His fall into the hole was design and not accident. Once under the water, he held his breath, headed down stream to get the benefit of the current, and swam for all he was worth.

He did not attempt to arise until his breath gave out. Then he thrust his head above water at a spot where it could not be seen.

Here he remained for a full minute, and had got his wind again, and was ready to sink, when the approach of an Indian made it necessary for him to do so.

He swam fully a hundred feet before he arose again. Another stretch or two carried him far enough away to be comparatively safe.

After hunting around for nearly an hour, Evil-Eye reluctantly gave up the search, satisfied that the pilot had perished.

When he had seen the last of them, he prepared to go ashore.

It would not have been safe to have emerged bodily from the hole and walk ashore. Thus he reasoned, and correctly, too, for a sentinel was even then lying in the bushes on the bank, watching the raft.

Once more the pilot sank and struck out toward shore. When his breath was gone, he arose, expecting to find an air-hole without trouble.

But he had gone some distance without finding one, his breath was completely gone, his brain was reeling.

“My God! am I going to be drowned after all I have passed through,” thought the pilot.

He resolved, in his despair, to make one more effort, and in a few seconds struck a hole.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, when he could fetch his breath.

Soon his feet touched bottom, and he could get along more rapidly.

At last, late in the afternoon, he emerged from the water, and hurriedly sought the cover of the woods.

His first thought now was of his friends, and he determined to at once return to them.

CHAPTER XII.

AND LAST.

THE Muskrat had had a narrow escape. Had the knife's course not been changed by striking a rib, its point must have penetrated his heart. As it was, he had received a nasty and painful wound.

After he and Evil-Eye had condoled with each other, they began to plan how to discover the abiding place of the exploring party.

"I've got it at last," exclaimed the renegade. "I'll make the dog do the business."

One of the young braves here approached the chief, and asked what was to be done with the body of Mahtoree.

A gleam of pleasure shot across Evil-Eye's face as he stood beside and kicked the dead body of Mahtoree.

"It is good!" he grunted. "Let the dog of a Pawnee lie there to become food for the beasts and the vultures," and he spat on the body to show his contempt of the dead man. "You gave this to Evil-Eye," feeling of the long scar on his cheek, "but Evil-Eye lives to see you killed like a cur, with your scalp at the belt of one of his braves."

It was late in the day before they attempted to put into execution the plan of the renegade in regard to the dog.

Faithful Maje! Had he known more than he did—had he known the use to which he was being put, he would have died in his tracks rather than have budged an inch.

But he did not know that he was being used to betray his friends, and when the renegade said: "Home, Maje," he trotted off, followed by Evil-Eye and the Muskrat, who held the end of the leash, the others bringing up in the rear.

The pilot, making for the same point, came across their trail just after they had passed. He saw Maje's tracks, and instinctively knew what was up.

Uttering a low cry of dismay he stood still for a moment, and then bounded swiftly away.

This home of his stood at the base of a perpendicular rock, standing on the top of which it was possible to reach the spreading branches of a tree whose trunk was enclosed by the same vines that concealed the hut.

On the top of this rock he emerged just as darkness gathered, and crawling out on the limb descended the trunk, appearing so suddenly before the men as to startle them greatly.

"It'll be a bad day for any among you who can't climb well," he said, in a low, rapid tone. "Mount this tree, do as I do, and ask no questions."

He started up the tree without an instant's loss of time, for he heard a sound that he understood. The savages, led by Maje, were near the spot. The dog had attempted to utter a glad bark, which had been cut off short by his being choked.

In five minutes all of the party stood on the top of the rock.

"Two of you remain here," said Joe. "See this big rock here on the brink? It was rolled here for just such an occasion. Watch yourselves, and when the Injins rush in behind the vines send her down. The others come with me."

Making a little detour he led them to the level below, and crept up in the rear of the Indians just as they, uttering a wild whoop, dashed forward and beneath the screening vines.

Crash!

The huge rock had fallen, and its fall was followed by shrieks and screams of anguish that turned the blood cold to listen to. And then a part of the band began to back away from the dangerous spot, unaware that a dozen sure rifles were behind them.

"Now!" yelled Joe.

Crack!—crack!—crack!

Crack!—crack!—crack!

Evil-Eye and the Muskrat, both in the lead, had been killed by the falling rock; the Indians, thus deprived of their leaders, were in confusion. Originally numbering thirty, eleven had been killed by the rock, and six had fallen by the rifles of the exploring party. The thirteen who remained, plunging madly toward the woods, thinking only of escape, unprepared to resist, fell easy victims to the keen knives of their antagonists.

It was not until morning that Joe could learn what had become of Maje. Then he found the body of the faithful animal, who, when he had fulfilled the purpose they wanted, had had his throat cut from ear to ear.

Bending over Maje's body, the tears flowed from the pilot's eyes.

"This has been a bad season for me," he muttered, sadly. "First the Teton, then Mahtoree, and now Maje. Guess I'll give up life here now."

For two days the party remained at Joe's home, or rather near it, for the rock which had done such fatal work had crushed the hut out of existence. Then they returned to the river bank and followed the trail beside the raft until they reached Shreveport, at which place they were to again take to the water.

By Joe's advice the company was here recruited by half a dozen trappers and hunters, which made them so formidable a body of men—not being encumbered by women or children—that no savages ventured to attack them.

Joe piloted the party well up to the head-waters of the river, and when the fall rains came they commenced the descent to the Mississippi, progressing three times as fast as in the ascent.

They turned aside but once, and that was to visit the place of the alcalde. Joe would not go near the house.

"She will not care to see the man who caused her father's death," he said, gloomily, to himself.

But on her asking for him, Captzin Sam sent for Joe, and he put in an appearance. Now, we did not start out to make this a love-tale, nor do we intend to make it so now. So we shall not transcribe what passed between Joe and Inez. The reader can easily guess, when he is told that Inez packed up her most valuable things, and accompanied the party down the river and to New Orleans, where the services of a minister were called into use.

Joe's parents had come from the East, he still had relations there, and he settled down to married life in a little town not far from New York.

To his dying day he kept above the mantle in his room the rifle with the copper covered stock, (found beside the body of the Muskrat, Mahtoree having found it, and had it in his possession when killed.)

This rifle I myself have seen; I have seen the door in the end opened and the package of dried scalps in the inside.

And for aught I know that rifle is in existence to-day, owned by some of his descendants, who may be unaware of its peculiarities. If they are, let them open the stock, and they will find there the proof of their forefather's vengeance, in the shape of twenty-four scalps torn from the heads of as many Comanches by the RED RIVER PILOT.

[THE END.]

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